

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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PASS: STATE FOR NYE, NOSENZO; ERDA FOR SIEVERING,
GIAMBUSSO, VANDERRYN, G.W. CUNNINGHAM

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: OECD, TECH
SUBJECT: INTERNATIONAL NUCLEAR ENERGY R & D

1. SUMMARY. MISSION HAS BEEN ADVISED OF THE
RELUCTANCE OF THE FRENCH CEA TO RECOMMEND PARTICI-
PATION IN THE PROPOSED INTERNATIONAL R&D PROGRAM ON
THE CONDITIONING OF RADIOACTIVE WASTE TO BE CARRIED
OUT AT THE EUROCHEMIC COMPANY. THIS POSITION IS SAID
TO BE BASED UPON COMMERCIAL INTERESTS AND IN THIS
RESPECT IS CONSISTENT WITH PREVIOUS FRENCH ACTIONS.

THIS POSTURE EFFECTIVELY NARROWS THE BASE OF MEANINGFUL
COOPERATIVE R&D ACTIVITIES WHICH CAN BE UNDERTAKEN WITH
FRANCE IN THE NUCLEAR ENERGY FIELD AND SHOULD BE
EVALUATED IN THE CONTEXT OF IEA/NEA RELATIONSHIPS.
END SUMMARY.

2. THE PROPOSAL FOR INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN WASTE
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MANAGEMENT TO BE CARRIED OUT AT THE EUROCHEMIC COMPANY
HAS BEEN IN THE FORMATIVE STAGE FOR SEVERAL YEARS.
THE PROGRAM CAN BE AN IMPORTANT DEMONSTRATION OF A
POTENTIAL ALTERNATE WASTE CONDITIONING TECHNOLOGY AND
COULD ESTABLISH A BASIS FOR FURTHER INTERNATIONAL
COOPERATION IN THE FIELD OF WASTE MANAGEMENT. IT IS
A JOINT IEA/NEA UNDERTAKING AND HAS THE SUPPORT OF THE

RELEVANT IEA AND NEA COMMITTEES AS WELL AS THE EUROCHEMIC COMPANY. TO BE SUCCESSFUL, THE PROGRAM MUST HAVE BROAD PARTICIPATION, A NECESSARY PRE-CONDITION FOR UNDERTAKING THE ACTIVITY. FOR FINANCIAL AS WELL AS ADMINISTRATIVE REASONS, IT IS ESSENTIAL

TO CONCLUDE THE AGREEMENT BEFORE THE END OF JULY. FAILURE TO DO SO WILL MOST LIKELY RESULT IN TERMINATION OF THE EFFORT.

3. THE COUNTRIES WHOSE SUPPORT IS CONSIDERED CRITICAL ARE THE U.S., FRG, JAPAN AND FRANCE. (FROM THE VERY BEGINNING, THE UK HAS INDICATED THAT IT WOULD NOT PARTICIPATE). OF THESE COUNTRIES, THE U.S. AND GERMANY HAVE CONFIRMED THEIR INTENTION TO PARTICIPATE. IT IS HIGHLY LIKELY THAT JAPAN WILL SHORTLY FOLLOW SUIT. THE NEA SECRETARIAT, HOWEVER, HAS INFORMED US ON A CONFIDENTIAL BASIS THAT FRANCE IS CONSIDERING NOT BECOMING A SIGNATORY TO THE AGREEMENT. THIS WOULD BE A CHANGE FROM THEIR PREVIOUS POSTURE.

4. WE ARE TOLD THAT THE BASIC PRESSURE FOR FRANCE TO ADOPT THIS NEW POSITION IS COMING FROM COGEMA, THE RECENTLY ESTABLISHED FUEL CYCLE SUBSIDIARY OF THE FRENCH CEA. COGEMA'S HESITATION ARISES FROM CONCERNS

THAT THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT WOULD BE PROVIDING SUPPORT FOR DEVELOPING A WASTE SOLIDIFICATION TECHNOLOGY IN COMPETITION WITH THE EXISTING "COMMERCIAL" FRENCH LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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VITRIFICATION PROCESS. AT THE SAME TIME, IT IS BELIEVED THAT THIS SUPPORT MIGHT BE VIEWED BY THE FRENCH PUBLIC AS A LACK OF CONFIDENCE IN EXISTING FRENCH TECHNOLOGY.

5. IN SEVERAL OTHER MESSAGES, MISSION HAS DISCUSSED THE PROS AND CONS OF THE PROPOSED INTERNATIONAL PROGRAM AT THE EUROCHEMIC COMPANY AND WE WILL NOT DWELL ON THESE ISSUES IN THIS CABLE. INSTEAD, WE NOTE THAT THE FRENCH CEA'S REPORTED POSITION IS CONSISTENT WITH PAST ACTIONS WHICH CLOSELY LINK COMMERCIAL AND POLITICAL INTERESTS IN THE NUCLEAR FIELD, AND COULD HAVE IMPORTANT IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE COOPERATIVE R&D ACTIVITIES.

6. THE SITUATION CLEARLY RESULTS FROM THE CEA'S

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DUAL ROLE AS A NATIONAL BODY AND A PUBLIC CORPORATION, THE LATTER CONCERNED WITH PROFITABILITY AND RATIONALIZATION OF INVESTMENTS, AND THUS EXERTING ITS INFLUENCE QUITE DIFFERENTLY FROM ITS COUNTERPARTS IN OTHER COUNTRIES. A RECENT EXPRESSION OF FRENCH POLICY IN THIS REGARD IS ILLUSTRATED BY THE FAILURE OF BILATERAL NEGOTIATIONS TO ESTABLISH A BROADLY BASED LMFBR AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE U.S. AND FRANCE ON THE ONE HAND, AND THE SUCCESSFUL NEGOTIATIONS WHICH LED TO COMMERCIALLY BASED AGREEMENTS BETWEEN FRANCE, THE FRG AND ITALY ON THE OTHER. THE RECENTLY ANNOUNCED CEA BREAKTHROUGH IN ENRICHMENT TECHNOLOGY MAY BE AN ADDITIONAL EXAMPLE. THE SITUATION ASSUMES ADDED SIGNIFICANCE IN THE CONTEXT OF INFCEP, SINCE FRENCH ABILITY TO PARTICIPATE IN INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS WITH POTENTIAL COMMERCIAL IMPACT IS EFFECTIVELY REDUCED.

7. MISSION BELIEVES IT MAY BE USEFUL TO CONSIDER THIS
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FRENCH POLICY AS A POSSIBLE BASIS FOR DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN NUCLEAR PROGRAMS CONSIDERED APPROPRIATE FOR THE IEA (IN WHICH FRANCE DOES NOT PARTICIPATE) AS OPPOSED TO THOSE SPECIFICALLY DIRECTED TOWARDS THE NEA OR OTHER INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS. THE U.S. IS CURRENTLY CONSIDERING A WIDE SPECTRUM OF ALTERNATIVE NUCLEAR SYSTEM STUDIES AND CERTAIN OF THESE ACTIVITIES MAY LEND THEMSELVES TO THIS TYPE OF SEPARATION. FOR EXAMPLE, WE CLEARLY CAN EXPECT LITTLE ENTHUSIASM FROM FRANCE TO UNDERTAKE STUDIES ON ALTERNATIVE BREEDER AND REPROCESSING SCHEMES WHICH DETRACT FROM THE CREDIBILITY OF THEIR RAPIDLY DEVELOPING LMFBR PROGRAM.

8. IN THIS REGARD, THE CERD WORKING PARTY ON NUCLEAR SAFETY IS CONVENING A SPECIALIST MEETING ON CO-OPERATIVE RESEARCH PROGRAMS ON THE SAFETY OF FUEL ASSEMBLIES DURING FUEL HANDLING, TRANSPORTATION AND STORAGE ON JUNE 7, 1977, WHICH MAY ILLUSTRATE THE ABILITY OF IEA TO INITIATE MEANINGFUL NEAR-TERM

NUCLEAR R&D PROJECTS IN THE ABSENCE OF FRENCH PARTICIPATION. LITTLE OF SIGNIFICANCE HAS BEEN ACCOMPLISHED BY THE IEA IN THE NUCLEAR ENERGY FIELD SINCE THE INITIAL FLURRY OF ACTIVITY SEVERAL YEARS AGO WHICH RESULTED IN THE LINKING OF SEVERAL EXISTING NATIONAL LWR SAFETY RESEARCH PROGRAMS TO THE OVERALL IEA R&D EFFORT.

9. THE DEPARTMENT SHOULD ALSO NOTE THAT WITH SOME MODIFICATION IN EMPHASIS (THAT IS, TOWARDS A ONCE THROUGH FUEL CYCLE), THESE POTENTIALLY NEW INITIATIVES CAN BE VIEWED AS CONSISTENT WITH (AND PERHAPS COULD BECOME A PART OF) INFCEP.

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